7-23-1996

Vande Wege, Mary Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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The Hope College Oral History Project for 1996
The Joint Archives of Holland

Interview #12
Mrs. Mary Vande Wege
Holland's Past Fifty Years

Conducted by:
Tracy Bednarick
July 23, 1996

Abstract (Subjects in general order of appearance in interview): Hungarian heritage, childhood in Holland, family, Reformed Church, Essenburg Electric Co., WWI, Heinz Co., the Depression, winter in Holland, WWII, changes in businesses in Holland, Holland Furnace, Literary and Bridge clubs, diversification of Holland, church, volunteering at the voting polls, Hope College, from Pittsburgh to Holland, the old house, Macatawa, Civic Health Committee of Women's Literary Club Baby Clinic, Sipp Houtmann (motorcycle mailman), Tulip Time, the two Stekettee stores, Pere Marquette Railroad, "Poor Man's Farm."

Interviewee: Mary Vande Wege (MVW), retired accountant and long time citizen of Holland.
Interviewer: Tracy Bednarick (TLB), oral history student coordinator.

TLB: All you have to do first is just say your name, your date of birth, and where you were born.

MVW: I was born here, but my whole family came here from Hungry. I am Hungarian. That is why I felt that I could talk, because when we came here there weren't many Hungarians here at all. It was most all Dutch. I have the feeling for both sides of it.

TLB: Your husband is?

MVW: Oh, he is Dutch.

TLB: I can tell from the name.

MVW: I can tell you that went good. After I got married, everything was honkey-dory.

TLB: People keep trying to make my name Dutch.

MVW: I am pretty good finding names. One year after I graduated from High School I went to Chicago. I had a sister, and two brothers there. They thought that I should go there and get a job. My husband was there too. We were not married then. We would go into the different downtown stores I loved to go in, in Chicago. He always used to ask the clerks what their nationality was, or he would try to pick it out. I used to get so irritated and embarrassed, but I find myself doing it. It is just natural to do it. We were Hungarian, we lived on the Westside. We had very good neighbors. My father came through Heinz. There was another family here, who were what we then called Bohemian. In fact, my parents lived

with them. We had five children, and those people had five. But for those first six weeks they were in Holland, which was in 1908, we lived together. In those times they could live together and get along well, and everything. I can get started on this, and I love it.

TLB: Why don't you say your name, and your maiden name too, where you were born, and when you were born? I will let you go.

MVW: My maiden name was Mary Chervensky. Now my name is Mary C. Vande Wege. I was born [date removed], 1907, in Pittsburgh.

TLB: Then you moved to Holland right after you were born?

MVW: In that same year, my father was sent to Holland. He was a cooper, and that was his work at Heinz. They needed that here, so the family came here to Holland.

TLB: Your parents immigrated from Hungry. Do you want to talk about your family and what growing up in Holland was like?

MVW: We lived on the Westside. There were very few foreign people around there. My mother fit in very well, and she tried to get along. My father said, "Family, we are in the United States now, this is the land of milk and honey, we are going to be Americans." Although we did talk Hungarian in our home as we were growing up, everyone learned to talk English, except my dad. He got along alright, but he wasn't very good at it, because at that time he was around forty-five years old, I think. We lived there, and I had nice playmates. A lot of little play-mates, all Dutch. But that is the way it was. I went to Van Raalte school, and I was one of the few foreign ones there. And I felt it. Then, my two brothers, and sister were

through school, but my other brother, and I went there. Many a time, I can still hear him coming home from school at noon, or so. He would just be on the verge of tears, because they would tease him. They would call him "hunkey," and stuff like that. We had to just put up with it, but by the time we left grade school and started going to high school we adjusted very well to it. Further on in high school, I met my boyfriend. We got married, then I was just about like a Dutch person. We were very good friends with his cousin, and his wife. I learned a lot of Dutch habits, customs, and food from her. I feel, after all, almost as much Dutch as anything else right now.

TLB: Do you remember any situations where your dad had trouble adjusting? Or any interesting situations from not knowing the language that came up?

MVW: No, because he had come three years before the family did. When he came, he went to Pittsburgh, and he got a job at Heinz company right away. My mother came three years later, with the rest of the family. They landed in Pittsburgh in April of 1906. In November, he was sent to Holland. He was here those three years, and I was just born the following year here. But in Holland, everybody knew him; neighbors got along fine. We all adjusted very well, I think.

TlB: Do you want to tell me some of the things that you did for fun in Holland when you were a child?

MVW: The simplest things, we were content with. As a little girl, I went to grade school, but we had our vacations. All us young girls would get together with our dolls. We would go to each other houses. That is one thing, we always had to have a

luncheon. Everybody would run home, and get something. They would all come with nice store cookies, or store bought bread and butter. My mother used to bake bread. She would bake those big loaves. Then she would cut a slice, and it would be thick. She would always make grape jam, because that was inexpensive. I would come with that big piece of bread with grape jam on it. I thought, "Just once, I wish that we could buy a loaf of bakery bread." I would give anything I could to eat some of that good bread now. Now we go to those places like The Great Bread Co. over on Lincoln Avenue, and have foreign breads.

After I left grade school, and went to high school, I had three very close friends. We went around a lot together. One of the girls had a car, which was very unusual because I graduated in 1924 from Holland High. There were very few cars. Now you can go by Holland High, and you have to have parking lots for cars. Then we had one. We would just go. Like in the summertime, we would go down to the band concert in Centennial Park. Often after High School, I would go downtown to the library. I always knew that my boyfriend would do that too. Then we would meet each other. I wasn't allowed to have dates, just as "dates." But we did see each other. He graduated a year ahead of me. He would then be in Centennial Park waiting. I would go downtown into the library, and then we would meet. Just nice things. We would have dates afterwards, going out to the movies. I lived way out on West 15th beyond Van Raalte Avenue. We would walk to school, high school. Also in the evening when he picked me up, we would walk downtown to the movies. We would walk, and walk way back home

again, thinking nothing of it. It was the thing to do, because you just didn't have cars. We were satisfied with what we had. We didn't have a whole lot of money either, none of us, but we had enough to get along on.

TLB: Do you want to talk a little bit about your immediate family? Your children, and grandchildren?

MVW: I would love to. I never finish doing that. My husband and I got married in 1926. I graduated in 1924. In those days there was industry and everything, but it was very hard for young people to get a job. And that happened with each of my brothers. I had three brothers, and a sister. Each one, after they graduated would go to Chicago and get a job. My oldest brother came back to Holland and got a job with the Holland Furnace Company. He was the chief heating engineer. I say that, because we were foreigners, you know. My other brother came back to Holland after he lived in Chicago for several years. He ended up running the license bureau here in Holland. My sister went to Northwestern University just to study music. Then she was a music teacher in Holland, too. My other brother worked for Swift and Company in Chicago. Then after that, he had his own meat company. I am saying these things, because we were first generation foreigners, and they all accomplished something good.

I was there (Chicago) only from after graduation until February. I was so homesick for Holland. It was a big city, and I had never been away before. I spent almost all my money, I made $17.00 a week as a stenographer. Every other week, just about, I would come home on the train, to see my folks. My mother

said, "That is ridiculous, spending all your money so that you could come back to Holland." The next day, I read in the paper about a job at the shoe company which was very near to my house. I went there and I got it, and I worked there until after I was married. Then I had two children, a girl and a boy.

TLB: What are their names?

MVW: My daughter's name is Mary, but they call her Muncie. She is about the only Muncie in the city of Holland. So many times, different people will ask how she got her name. The afternoon she was born, my father went down to what they used to call the pickle dock, behind Heinz Company. He was fishing, and after she was born my husband went down to tell him. He said that we had a little girl. And my dad said, "Oh, another little Muncie." That was my nickname. The name stuck. She graduated from Hope in 1949. She taught in Holland High School, and she still is a substitute teacher there. She got married in 1949, and she is still teaching. Her husband also was a teacher in the Holland High School. He is retired too. My son went to Hope for two years. Then he went to Northwestern University in Evanston. He graduated from there as an electrical engineer. Right now, I am so proud, he is working in Pasadena, California at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory on the Saturn rocket. [The following section has been edited significantly in comparison to original interview.] He worked for about fifteen years outside of Chicago for the Automatic Electric Company. at that time everybody was going to California to seek their fortune. So he went too. He has a family of three boys. He did work after that for McDonald Douglas. They

downsized a couple years ago. he was on the verge of retirement, and then he lost his job. He was without work for over a year, but now he works at Herman Miller. He graduated from Hope College and has a Master's Degree from Western in Kalamazoo. He has a boy and a girl, fourteen and twelve years old. They are pleasant grandchildren. My grand-daughter, Julie Olsen, graduated from Holland High and attended Western in Kalamazoo. Now she is a real estate agent, doing well. She has one daughter, Kathryn, eight years old and attends Harrington School in Holland. Her husband does custom building of homes. My daughter's next son, John, also works for Herman Miller, as well as his wife, Juli. She is a buyer, planner for new product development. The fourth child is Mary Ann, who lives in Ann Arbor and works there My son has three boys and lives in California. The oldest one, John, graduated from Northridge-California University, and now works for the Los Angeles Times doing their video advertising. He and his wife have two little girls. The next grandson is Jeff. He also graduated from University of Southern California. He works for Pega systems in Sacramento, and has taken three trips to London this year Then the youngest one, James, is twenty-five, he's not married yet. He works for United Parcel. My daughter's forth is a girl, and she is right now working in Ypsilanti. [A paragraph has been deleted here in relation to original] You've got to forgive me, but my family means so much to me. They are all wonderful.

Now that I am alone, they are so kind to me. They take me places, and come to visit me. I couldn't wish for anything more. The only thing I could wish is that

I could walk better, and this has only been the last few years. I do my best to get along.

TLB: I am going to move on to Holland for a little bit. I think we will jump back to more of your family life in a bit. What are some qualities that seem to stand out concerning the city of Holland?

MVW: I am a strong supporter for Holland. The people are honest and they have that good work ethic. I do think that the Holland people are clannish. I joined my husband's church, a Reformed Church, and got in with all those people; I think that I have become like all the rest of them. Your friends are there, it is just natural, you are with those people and you have your friendships, and get together. It is just kind of natural to have that happen to us. I do know that we have to spread out a little bit, and do things differently, but by and large that is what I feel about Holland.

TLB: Are there any negative aspects to Holland or any drawbacks to living in Holland?

MVW: Yes, there are some wherever you live, but overall this is a good place to live. Now I feel that I am in such a sheltered life. I am living in a condo, and I don't get out that often. I used to work downtown. I worked at Keppel's for twenty-seven years as an accountant. That was just from graduating from high school. In those days, I guess our teachers taught us really well. My husband worked forty years for the Essenburg Electric Company. He was a repair man. He loved his work, and he did good work. When he passed away I had more cards and calls from different people that remembered him. He was always a very friendly

person, he had a good sense of humor. That carried him through his whole life.

TLB: I skipped over this question, what was it like to raise your children in Holland?

MVW: It was wonderful. They went to Van Raalte school and all the kids around there went there. PTA, and all that we would go too. We had our church and would go to Church and Sunday school on Sunday. Those days they had Christian Endeavor in our church on Sunday afternoon. On Wednesday nights they went to Catechism. Maybe it was a sheltered life, but it was a good life. I had a lot of friends at Trinity, and I still have, but I am almost ninety, so many of them have passed on. It is only when you sit down and think about it once in a while. I sit in church on Sunday morning, and look around. There are so many people new who you don't know. It is just in the last six months or so I have tried to make the effort to learn the new ones and speak a little bit with them. When you do, you feel better. I think that is what we all have to do. It is not a closed society anymore.

TLB: That is so to have for someone who is new to the community. To help them feel welcome.

MVW: Now what they do when they have different people join the church after the services, they line the people up in the back, you then go and shake hands with them, and say a few words. It does you good, as well as them too. I am an outgoing person, and a friendly person, but it is easy to just slip back in your own little group. I can tell you that.

TLB: What was it like during World War I, in Holland?

MVW: Well, we had rationing just like the others. They asked for volunteers. I helped

handing out card for sugar and gasoline. There were a lot of things that we didn't have, but you learned how to do without them. I was always the one to go to the store and so on, because my mother was foreign. Although, she did learn to talk; it was easy because I was growing up in school so I knew all those things. She would always send me to the store. I was a young one. I bet I wasn't anymore than ten years old. Right next door was her cousin, a man who also came from Budapest. They never entered in, because they never had children. I always would do the grocery shopping for her too. At that time, they would give you a penny. You would go to the store, and get a loaf of bread or so, and you would get a penny for it. Last week, I had two of my great grandchildren, and their parents from California. Before they left, I lined them up and I said, "Now I am going to give you something. This is what old Dutch and Hungarian Grandmas used to give kids money when they'd come to visit." These from California they know their name is Dutch, and they hold to that. I gave them each a nice crisp dollar bill. I thought to myself, "I remember when I got a penny!" That was a big thing. They liked it. The younger one, he is only three years old, walked around waving that money. By the time he left it wasn't a crisp dollar bill anymore. He wouldn't give it up, he had to hold on to that. I would go down to pay the light bill and the gas bill, in those days which was around the first World War. In the winter time we didn't have gas; they would turn it off to save money.

My father when I first came here worked for Heinz for about a dollar a day. When I started to work in Chicago, I got $17.00 a week, and out of that I paid

train fare and room and board. I still can't get used to the prices that some of the people pay for things. My daughter says, "Mom, you get two - three times more now, and things cost in proportion to it." And I know that too.

We went through the Depression. I just had a baby at that time, and it was hard because the banks were closed. We didn't have much in the bank. We couldn't touch our money for awhile. I could remember in that time, one Christmas we had about $2.00 to spend for each child for a gift. But we lived through it. Now, about five years ago, the seven of them from California came home for Christmas. We had such a pile of gifts under the tree, that I was embarrassed. Now these people don't buy one, it is two or three gifts. The young ones hear on the T.V. what they want, and they let you know what they want too. They have to have all those unusual toys. When my children were young, they did get toys, clothes, and always a decorated tree, but nevertheless they were satisfied with books, both of them loved books. And we all were.

TLB: Is there anything else that you want to say about the Depression in Holland?

MVW: This isn't exactly the Depression, just when I went to grade school. That was when we were the few foreigners here. My brother and I felt we weren't welcome; I think that we were, but it was hard to get used to living with all the Dutch people. It was very difficult. As time went on, I became more Dutch than some of the Dutch people here. I learned a lot from my husband's Dutch relatives.

Well, I am just happy to say that most all of my children, and a good share of my grandchildren have all been able to graduate from college, and have degrees.

It is possible, when they try. Anyway, my parents were poor, but the nevertheless they always wanted their children to have the best of what they could give them.

TLB: Do you remember what some chores were like in your household? You said you went and got groceries. Is there anything that stands out, like laundry?

MVW: Chores. I did wash dishes, I remember that. Even when we were first married, my husband and I lived at home with my mother and my father. We had a cook stove, in the winter my husband would get up early because he had to start to work at 6:30 in the morning; he would start the fire for my mother so that she could cook coffee and make breakfast. To think of getting up in the morning to have to light a fire first, before you could cook was really something. But that is the way it was, and we never thought anything of it. Now you go in the kitchen and turn on the switch and it is done in no time. That is those differences between those times and now.

TLB: What was winter like in Holland?

MVW: It was deep snow, although we have had deep snow recently too. I can remember seeing the snow plows come on the sidewalks. They were plows pulled by horses. We lived near Heinz company. At that time, Heinz cooked what they called Heinz's soup; it was for animals. The cutters used to come past our house, and they had big barrels on the back. They would go down to the Heinz company. That is what I remember. Also in the summer time when they had cucumbers the farmers would come past our house with wagons, with cucumbers in crates. We would run after them, and they would throw us a couple cucumbers. You would

take them home, and mother would use them. Kids did a lot of different things. They never thought of being destructive. I suppose that went on too, but never that I exactly knew. I remember once, my neighbor had tulips, and my little boy went over and picked a couple of tulips. He came home and the neighbor told me. His father dealt with that right away. Those are things that do happen; it was bad but not that bad. Of course he still remembers it today; we talk about it, and laugh about it now. I can remember he had a boyfriend whom he had to go and call for to go to school. He got there a little early, and the boy didn't come out. He stood there and he had a pencil, and he wrote a little bit on the door frame. That mother called me up. I sent him over with some kitchen cleanser and a rag, and he had to go over there and clean it off. That was the end of that. They did do things. All children did, and will.

TLB: Do you remember, in particular, any winters that were very hard?

MVW: Yes, 1917, I think it was. They closed up all the schools. My brother was at Holland High then, he was allowed to bring a typewriter home. He could keep on practicing. Oh, how I eyed that typewriter. I think maybe that lead me to go into office work. It never occurred to my mother when I graduated from high school in '24 that I should go on to college. I thought that was nice and everything, but it seemed so out of grasp that I never went on.

And as I said, I learned enough, and well enough so that I could afterwards be a bookkeeper downtown for twenty-seven years, at Keppel's. I loved the work. Now, I have my desk in the den. I just love when I have to sit down and write out

checks and so forth, do anything with numbers. I always say that with bookkeeping one and one is two; it is no other way. It has to be correct. I did accounts receivable, accounts payable, the payroll, and all that. After I left that job, my employer told me that it was six months before they had someone who could balance the checkbook. I just loved figures. My oldest grandson is also a C.P.A, I say also, because my brother-in-law was one. Now he is working at Herman Miller, but he was a C.P.A. I am sure that he followed in my footsteps, and that has always pleased me so much.

TLB: You worked when you had children?

MVW: I worked at first when I got married, and then it wasn't long until I had a little girl. My son is six years younger. I didn't work then, until he was about ten years old. That is when I went back to work. I had it all planned; I wouldn't have left them for anything. Right now, in California both of my daughters-in-law, who have children have quit their jobs and say that they want to be full time moms. I think that is just wonderful.

TLB: That is good.

MVW: It is so worthwhile. My oldest grandson and his wife had a little boy. Without thinking one day, we went over there my husband, and I. She said, "Well, in a few more months I go back to work again."

I said, "Are you going to leave this little boy to someone else?" I realized that I shouldn't have said it, but I had.

The next morning she called up. She said, "Grandma, we have thought it

over, I am not going back to work right away." I was so happy, and I was a little bit embarrassed. She was glad afterwards that she hadn't done it.

TLB: What are some of the biggest changes you have seen in Holland? Actually let us skip this question first.

MVW: All right.

TLB: Let's talk about World War II, and what that was like. Was it much different that how it was in World War I? What are some things that stand out about it?

MVW: In World War I, I was so young. I had a brother at that time who was in France. He was working in Chicago, then he came home one weekend and said, "I've enlisted." I was proud as could be, but my poor mother was heartbroken. But anyway he went back, and he went to Rockford, Illinois at Camp Grant. Then he was shipped over to St. Nazaire, France. He used to write me letters; I was only ten or twelve years old then. I was so pleased with that. In those days we had a service flag in our window. One star for one. Some would have two or three stars, that was really wonderful. It was so different, but it was a time to be very patriotic.

In the next war, World War II, my son did the same. He started in Evanston at Northwestern. He had just one year, and then he came home one day, and said, "I am going to enlist, and get my service done." He went and enlisted. In a few weeks they called him. Then he was gone for almost two years. First he was in Hudsonville, Alabama and then he went to Belle Isle, in Detroit. There was no chance of him leaving the country at that time, so I didn't worry too much about it.

But we all pulled together, as I said, I did volunteer work for the city. We went without things, like sugar, gas, and things like that. But it was the thing to do. Nylons stockings were hard to get. We had only rayon and those were stiff. But if everybody else had them, you just did the best of it too. Money was scarce then. As I said, one year we had $2.00 each for the kids. But you make do with it. As times get better, then you relax. We just made the best of whatever we had to do with, it out, because it was patriotic. As I told you before, my father had said, "We are here now, we are going to be good citizens." That was instilled in us. On Memorial Day, I heard the patriotic program on T.V.; I think that was not John Williams and the Boston Pops orchestra. I heard that all night. I could have got on a soap box myself, because it does make you feel patriotic.

TLB: What was Holland like after World War II, when all the Veterans came back?

MVW: It was wonderful to see them each time, each one coming home. They would put in the church bulletin that so and so was returning. Things started to relax, not let down, but relax a little bit. You know when you had things bad, and then when things change again you get into the other cycle of things so easy. It was good to have. That is when employment started to go up. Prices too, and salaries improved. It was odd to see things coming. That did go slowly. My husband had a job, and I did. Each one of us, we didn't make too much, but little by little the prices went up, and the salaries went up. You just went with the flow of it again.

TLB: Ok, now what are some of the biggest changes that have happened in Holland,

mostly since World War II, but some other things too?

MVW: I don't get out as much as I used to. Up to three years ago my husband was in a rest home, and I would take him out in the summer at least four afternoons a week. I would take him all around Holland and Zeeland. Some times to Grand Haven. To see all those factories being built. Now too, that I don't go too often, when I do get out my mind is just blown with everything that has improved in Holland, and being built in Holland. But of course, it has its down point too, because we don't have enough housing and all those things. Usually everybody built a house, and took care of it. It is so very different now. I hate to see that in our town, but it is happening. That is just so hard to take when you like to see things nice.

TLB: One of the biggest changes of Holland is its growth, what do you think makes it possible for Holland to grow?

MVW: I think that because there are so many new factories, and businesses. They need employees. There certainly aren't enough in Holland that could do what they are supposed to do. They have to go outside for it. That I think is one of the big things that are our problems here.

People don't have the feeling for things, or a good share of them, like they did years ago. You don't want to downgrade them; I don't like to do that. That work ethic is not near what it used to be. Like I said, I worked for one place twenty-seven years, my husband for forty. The thing was to stay at a place. Now these young people, they work at a place for five years, and then all of sudden they are

changing positions and jobs. That starts right in our city, and all the offices. That is going on all the time. They don't get a chance to stay loyal. Money is the big thing. They want to go where they have more, and a lot of money. The loyalty to work isn't the same.

TLB: I can get an idea.

MVW: The thing was, even the Superintendent of the Holland Schools who was E. E. Fell for years and years you had the same Superintendent. That was the thing when certain ones were in the same job for a long time. That isn't the ethic now at all. If they go good, before you know it somebody else will offer them a job, and before you know it they are gone again. That is the new style of doing things. Maybe it is all right; I wouldn't think so, but maybe it is. I know that I am old fashioned, and you don't get over your old fashioned feeling too easy, not when you are almost ninety years old.

TLB: Do you remember any controversy that has ever happened in Holland?

MVW: I am sure that there have been. Well, what happened at the Holland Furnace Company. I have read the books on it, but my brother was a chief heating engineer there. During World War I, I remember seeing an ad that was in a magazine that the government wanted the best heating engineer in the country. They had to heat barracks at camps, and our country never had that before. They went to the Holland Furnace Company and took their chief heating engineer. He went to Washington D.C. for a year or so. He planned and did blueprints. At that time, I was only twelve years old. That only came to me afterwards when I read

different things about him, what he did and why he did it.

TLB: That was your brother?

MVW: That was my oldest brother.

TLB: How is daily life different now, than it was in 1950, or just after World War II?

MVW: I can't tell you so much, because at that time I was very busy, and very happy. I had my husband. One of my children was married in 1949, but I had my children. Before that they were home, they were going to school. Life was really good, now it is good but I am alone. My husband has just been gone two years, and I am still mourning him even though I know it couldn't be any different, and I have accepted that. In those days, I belonged to Bridge Club. I belonged to Ladies' Aid and Literary Club. I had different things. I always had something to go to. As we got a little bit older, we both would have a whole month vacation in March. We would go out west to Tuscan, and after my son and his wife moved out to California, we would always go and stay with him, for at least a week. Life was great. It is great now too, but in a much different way. My daughter takes me grocery shopping once a week, and on Saturday morning we always go to the mall. Of course, I don't need much anymore, but nevertheless it is fun to go, and buy a few things anyway. I do go a few places. Again, I did have a bridge club, but out of ten ladies there is another women and me that are the only ones left. That is just par for the course for now, you know. My grandchildren are wonderful. They come to me, they take me out, but it isn't the same as when my children were home. The goose hangs high. Everything was great.

I had a wonderful job downtown, at Keppel's, a very good employer. I could get out twice a month to go to Literary Club. I could get off every other week to go to Bridge Club. I had an arrangement with him. I was the only one in the office. I made up for it. I did all the work I had to do, and then some. My life then was just wonderful. Now it is all-right. I have no complaints, but it is not nearly as busy. Last winter, a couple times we had those awful snow storms. There were times when two or three days, I didn't even see anybody at all. But I do have a phone. My children saw to it that I had a phone in every room, so that I don't have to do too much walking. On the other hand, they say, "Mom, you've got to walk." I try to cover those things anyway.

TLB: Can you talk about how the Dutch heritage still plays in the community? Does it still have an influence on Holland?

MVW: Well, I feel just as strong about the Dutch heritage, because having been in my husband's circle. All the people I was with had Dutch stock. Some of their parents had been here longer than mine. I mean another generation. We were all just about the same.

TLB: What do you make of the increasing amount of different cultures coming into Holland?

MVW: I have to work at thinking that it is all-right. I know what is right, and it would be very easy to just try to ignore it, but I know that that is not the Christian way to do. And it isn't good when I read all these articles how those things have to be integrated. I just know that I have to accept that. Then I can all of a suddenly see

on the horizon that things are going to be all-right. It is awful easy to stay in your own little group all the time. I know that you mustn't do that.

I do know, or have had that feeling about foreign people, because my folks were foreign, I have to feel that way. My folks never forgot their origin. My mother always taught me to be proud that I had Hungarian heritage. But being with the Dutch so much, I could see their side of it. When you are with someone for so much of the time, I felt just as Dutch as they did. I never pushed my Hungarian heritage like a lot of people do now. I feel if we come here, if I want to come to Holland, then I want to come because it is good there. If it is good because of the Dutch people, then we don't want to change it.

TLB: You come to it, because you like it then you shouldn't want to change it from what it is.

MVW: But it is changing any way you look at it.

TLB: Along with the rest of the world.

MVW: Yes, that is true.

TLB: Have you been involved with the church, you mentioned the church quite a bit, do you want to talk about some of the things that you did with the church?

MVW: For one thing, I joined my husband's church and was accepted. By that time, I had a Dutch name. I even got to be president of the Ladies Aid. We had another Ladies Aid, I was the treasurer for six years, although you are only supposed to have one year. Because I had been an accountant, I just loved that work. A friend and I were in charge of the lunch for a bazaar. We had a bazaar for about five

years in a row. I also was the treasurer, so I had to do that too. It was fun. For several months ahead of time, we would go to church each Monday morning to sew. We would all bring something, and have a potluck. You sit around a long table with a bunch of women, and you can't help but be friends with them.

My children went to Sunday school, and then they went to C.E. on Sunday afternoons. They became very involved with that. My daughter graduated from Hope College. She has been in a lot of things. She was chairman of the Hope College Village Square. Right now she does a lot of volunteering for Evergreen Commons. If she knows that I am talking about that, she will say, "Mom, you shouldn't talk about that." Anyway, they were all kind of active in those kinds of things. Right now, I still belong to the Literary Club, and we sew there once a month for the hospital. I go there, and there again we all sit at long tables and do the sewing. Those are all women from different churches. You sit and talk, and then we always have a luncheon at noon. You get friendly with those people. When I come home, I feel so good. I have seen different people then, and gotten different ideas, and different stories, and so on. It is what makes life so worthwhile.

What was the first question that I started on?

TLB: It was just to talk about some of things that you have been involved in, within the church. Do you think that the church is stronger in the city, than it is in some other cities?

MVW: Yes, I think so, because I think that they work hard at it. Even my own church is

getting so many different groups in it. Not clubs, but organizations in the church that address these things. They even have a day care center. We thought that we would take care of our own children. Nowadays women seem to have to go out, and work. We did all those kinds things ourselves. I think that the people in Holland, and other places too but because I live here I know it, that these churches work at it to make these things strong. A week ago Sunday, we had a nice new class of people join our church. Some of them were from another one that was going downhill, but others of them were from other places. Those are different people. I can sit in the church and think, "I don't know that one. I don't know that one. I don't know that one. I wonder who that is?" Before you knew everybody that came in. Yes, the churches are changing too, but I do think that they are strong. We need it.

TLB: I was going to ask you about some organizations that you have been involved in, but you covered that. How did you get involved in some of these organizations?

MVW: With the Literary Club, I had friends that were there. All of a sudden I was just tired of working, after twenty-seven years. Some of my friends said, "Why don't you join the Lit. Club?"

And I thought, "Yes, I guess that is all-right." So I applied, and I did join. This past fall, at our opening luncheon they honored members that had been members for fifty years, which included me. I was just thrilled. I thought of all the people I knew, of course there are a lot there that I don't know, the older ones are gone, or they can't come. You have to get to learn the new ones. That is

when you have groups like the Sewing Committee that you learn who they are. You learn to make friends.

As far as Ladies' Aid, I worked hard, but that was right in the church. One day, a women moved away from Holland. They said, "Wouldn't you like to join our Bridge club?" I did, and I think that I was in there for about forty-five years. Now there are just two of us left. My friend, and I are both have difficulty getting around, so we visit on the phone. My friend lives at the Warm Friend, and it is just an effort to get together.

TLB: Concentrating on Holland, how do you think the role of women has changed?

MVW: Oh, so much! There are women in all industries, and so many of them work. They do different things. When they get home at night, I imagine that they are very busy in order to get their work done. When I was working and I had children, I can remember in the summer time that I wanted to do canning. I would stop at five o'clock on the way home at the Farmer's Market on West 8th Street. Then I would go home, and can it. I did the house work, and I did the washing. I don't know how I ever did all that, but I did. I got through that too.

As far as women are concerned, there are so many widows. They have card clubs, and get together, and go out for luncheons, and on trips. (Significant portion of original interview deleted here.) That's how they spend their time.

TLB: Did you arrange it so that you were only working when your kids were at school?

MVW: Very much so.

TLB: So you got home at the same time?

MVW: Yes, you have to work at something like that. Toward the last, my daughter was in college. I still remember taking her and her friends, in the morning to school, and then picking them up. Then you had to plan those things. I didn't worry about either one of them, because they were both in school. Several years, I just worked mornings. World War II is when I started working all day long.

TLB: What made you decide to go back to work?

MVW: [laughs] We needed the money. My husband had a job, but we were buying a house, and raising two children. We knew that college was coming. That is another thing, when I hear that this and that college you have to pay more at, and how many thousands of dollars it is. When my daughter started Hope, it was $65.00 a semester. She worked at Du Zaar's Photo Shop. How different that was from now. Both children helped when they went to school. We helped our son when he went to Northwestern, it was a whole lot more. Every time he could pay, he would. My husband had a book, I never entered into it, that was their business. He paid up until the last cent, the money that we had forwarded to him. That big hi-fi, that is what he gave his dad when he was all through paying for his education.

TLB: $19,000 a year now. Luckily, I have scholarships.

MVW: That is one thing about my son. When he was in high school, they had to go to Kalamazoo, and there was mathematics contest. The superintendent called me up to tell me that he had won it that day, but we didn't have enough money to send him to Kalamazoo to Western Michigan University. I happened to talk to a man

who was at Hope College one morning at coffee downtown. I said, "Gee, my son has a got a scholarship, but he can't go."

He said, "Oh, we can do something about that. We can transfer that to Hope."

It wasn't too much, but nevertheless he did go there for two years on that scholarship. When he went to Northwestern, he lived at a women's house. He cut the grass, and helped with the house. Both of them were very ambitious, and had the work ethic, like we all like to have.

TLB: I wonder if that is something that is changing about kids today too?

MVW: I wonder that too.

TLB: Tell me about one job, or one task that you have done that you really enjoyed.

MVW: I'll tell you that I worked for twelve years at the polls. There were two other women, we all happened to live within four or five blocks of each other. At first I was just sent to this place and that place, but we finally got all three of us at Herrick Library. I liked that job, because it covered a part of Holland where I used to live before I was married. I knew a lot of people. People would come in whom I hadn't seen for years. I can remember one was a sister of a principal at Van Raalte school; I went to school with her when we were just in Van Raalte. I hadn't seen her for years, and I was so pleased to see her once again. Meeting people, I liked that job very much. I just gave that up about four years ago, because I had hip surgery. So I had to give that up, It made me feel very badly. But anyway, that was one job that I just loved.

TLB: Can you tell me what your family says when they come back to visit Holland? About the city, and how it has changed?

MVW: Oh! I can tell you about one thing. As I said, my son is in California. I sent him an envelope like that [shows size with her hands] of clippings from the Sentinel. They were about "Big Red," the lighthouse, about that minister in Spring Lake, and about the woman being ordained in the Christian Reformed Church. They loved to hear about it, they love to come. His son and family was here just last week for a week. They couldn't get over how Holland has changed.

In the winter time, my daughter is gone three months from January to March, so I don't get around too much with snow and everything. This spring when she got back, and took me out I was dumbfounded at the building, the changes in Holland, the things that had been torn down, the new ones that have been put up. It just boggles the mind, really. It is no wonder that Holland is known as the fastest growing county in Michigan. It is just unbelievable. And you wonder where in the world all that money is coming from. [laughter]

TLB: Maybe from the industry?

MVW: A lot of it, sure.

TLB: Was there ever a job that you were employed at in Holland that you didn't enjoy?

MVW: I worked at the Holland Shoe Company when I first came back from Chicago. I liked that very much. Then I got married, and got pregnant, so I gave that up. I did have about three months at Victory Shipbuilding Company. They were building some ships for World War II out at Macatawa. I liked that one too.

Then I worked downtown for such a long time. I liked every one of my jobs.

TLB: What about Hope College, how has Hope College changed? And how does it interact with the city?

MVW: It has grown so much. When my daughter went there, so many of her friends from high school went too. I had a very good feeling toward it. She liked it. The girls would come over to our house so often. They were good Hope students. I have a soft feeling in my heart for Hope. She has been on different committees and such since then. She has kept up friendships with them. Those girls they started being friends, about eight of them, in high school. Now they have all married and have had children, and grandchildren. They still get together every once and awhile. I think it is wonderful. All of them are retired from their present positions.

How does Hope College interact? I have no interaction with it now. I know that it is there. I do think that they are taking too many of our houses inside the town. After all, all those houses don't pay taxes. That puts a burden on the others. I think anything that is so big, isn't as near as personal as smaller things. That is the way that I feel about Hope, but I know that it is wonderful what they are doing. They are changing our town an awful lot. A lot of things have changed.

TLB: I imagine that it is something that is hard to get used to as it keep sprawling out.

MVW: Very much so. And as I say again, you get older. You just don't like to see that so much. I know that it is old fashioned, but I can't help it.

TLB: You get used to things.

MVW: Yes. That is right. It has been the other way, for all these years.

TLB: I don't have any more questions. Do you want to talk anymore about your family history? Is there anything you missed? Or what it was like to grow up in Holland?

MVW: No, I think that I covered it all pretty well. My folks were so glad to get here, after all when they first got to America they lived in Pittsburgh. That was a big town. My father came first. He was a laborer over there. They had three boys, and they knew that when they were grown they would have to be in the army. They just wanted them to have a better life, because they knew that they would never get far ahead, because of the situation. My father said that he was going to come over here and prepare for them. He went, and he borrowed money. This is all stuff that I have heard in the family that I didn't learn. It was just by osmosis. Anyway, he went to the minister's daughter. She was a teacher. She lent him money to come here at ten percent. Of course, that was terrible then - that much. But anyway, he did it. He came alone. My mother had four children; she went to her mother's house. I have seen pictures of homes there in Hungry. They are big square places. In her mother's house she had a big room. She lived there, with the four children. This is the way that I have remembered it. My father would send money home to her, to keep them. Even my sister was a young girl around six to eight years old, she did some little farm work. When dad thought that he had enough money he sent her boat tickets. I just looked about that today. I

didn't even know that; he sent tickets for her to come here.

She had a cousin, a single man. He wanted to come too. So he came. On the ship, they were separated: the men, and the women. The man cousin took the two older boys, because they were fourteen, and sixteen, and stayed with them on one part of the boat. My mother went with my sister, and my brother. They landed in Ellis Island. In those days, they had a lot of immigrants coming in. They had trains there waiting for the people to take them to different cities where they were needed. My father was in Pittsburgh, where he worked. They had their ticket for Allegheny, that is a suburb of Pittsburgh. They got on. But my Uncle Steve got on the wrong train, and he went to Dayton, Ohio. It was a couple years, before they found each other. There was a Hungarian newspaper in Cleveland, my mother always took that. She advertised for him, and then he came to Holland too.

My father had a home for them. I would give anything if I knew how he got it, how it was furnished. There were some things there that my mother brought from the old country. I remember in our upstairs, we had a wooden box with all kinds of stuff in it. I suppose that they had clothes and everything in there. She landed here in April, and I was born the following January. That was all so different for my mother. They had one really good set of friends, and they were my Godparents when I was born in Pittsburgh.

TLB: Where they Hungarian too?

MVW: Yes, I have the my birth certificate from the church, and their name is on there.

My father worked for Heinz. As I said, he was a cooper. That is when Heinz in Holland was starting to go good. They made vinegar then. He made barrels. They sent him here with the family. Heinz is on Ottawa Avenue, and two blocks to Harrison Avenue where we lived. There was a man that also worked at Heinz; they were Bohemian. We lived with the Joseph Heinecke family for six weeks. One house down there was a house that was for sale, and my parents bought it. That house was six hundred dollars. My mother and father both died in there. They were so proud to own a home. My father's name was Philip Chervensky and he worked for the H.J. Heinz Company for thirty years.

My sister told me that she can remember when she was about ten years old, and they came over on the ship that they would have arrived on Easter Sunday, but the captain slowed it down so that they wouldn't get in on a holiday. Anyway, when she got there my father had a straw hat with a ribbon on it for her for Easter Sunday. Every time I thought about that it just thrilled me to think about those things. Also, before they got off the ship they had to have a physical examination. [shows copy of it] I saw an Affidavit of Surgeon. The Surgeon General said to my mother, "You have three fine boys, they are all healthy." Because they had to go through that. Those are just things that I have written down, and remembered. They are so precious to me. There are so many more questions that I wish I would have asked.

We lived here, and I grew up here. Another thing that my mother brought in that big box were pillows from the old country, feather ones. When I got married

she gave me four or five of them. Twice I had pillows made into new ticking. Last fall my grandson got married. I just happened to mention that I had some pillows left over from my mother that she had brought over. I said, "I really thought of having those made into pillows for you, but you want new ones."

My new daughter-in-law answered, "You know, I would love those from you. That would make me feel like I know your mother. Something from your mother, too."

So I took them down to a place here on Michigan Avenue, and out of three pillows they made two pillows. She has those feather pillows, and they are beautiful.

With such a heritage, how could we have not grown up well? I have a very loving family. In April, my nephew from California called me one day. He said, "Aunt Mary, my son wants to know a little bit more about the family." I send a Christmas card every year, and I write a little bit about the family. He said that he would like to know more about it, so that is when I started doing a family tree. I never realized how much it would entail. I counted the names on the tree, when I was done - eighty-five. [shows pictures] My sister had three girls and one boy. My brother had three girls, and a boy. I sent all of them several pictures with the Family Tree and they all were so pleased.

I lived on 18th Street for sixty-three years. We built the house when we got married. In one house - sixty-three years. We sold it in '88 and came here, to a condo because we needed a smaller place. We couldn't take care of it. It took a

lot of work, because my husband was a fussy person. And I was too. I had to go through all the stuff, I had three bedroom upstairs. I got rid of a lot of it, but I have plenty here. My husband just put it in boxes and wrote "memories" on them. I read things that I had forgotten about years ago. Also it reminded me of things. Since I have done it, my mind has been so active thinking about things. [more discussion about doing her family's history]

My folks had five children, and they all got married. One of them didn't have any children. The oldest one had six, and the other one had four. I had two. We had enough. Each one again had children. That is how it got up to eighty-five. Plus just a couple of weeks ago, one new baby was born out in Montana. I've lived on those memories now for weeks and weeks. The fun of things is sharing with people. It is sharing that makes life worthwhile.

TLB: Can you think of any of those memories that stand out?

MVW: I have been saying some of them right along. I can see now that my father was the one that came and worked, but my mother was the one who served as the impetus. She is the one who wanted her family to have it better. She always wanted her family to have good things, nice things. We couldn't always. When we built our house my mother was so happy. In fact, because of her pushing we undertook a little bit more I think than we should have at the time. I had a house there for sixty-three years. I had a death and a birth there. And my brother got married there. I had open houses for each one of my children to meet the family. I had any number of birthday parties there, for my children and my grandchildren.

It was a happy, loving house, and when I moved here I thought that my heart would break. Just last week, my grandson came here and said, "Grandma, what do you think, your house is for sale again?" I would like to go to see it. My son from California came here a few years ago, and he went by there. (A significant portion of the original interview is deleted here.)

The woman who bought the house said, "Do you want to come in and see?"

He said, "No."

He told me, "Don't look at that, because that was your house, and you want to remember it the way you had it."

But when my grandson, Johnny, came in the house and told me, "Grandma, I went to Grandpa's workroom in the basement, and it still has a horseshoe over the door." I started to cry when he told me that. I never knew what end of a screwdriver to use, because he did everything. I took care of my daughter's kids an awful lot, and I had them overnight, and stuff like that. So they were in my home, my daughter's four kids, an awful lot. So that house meant just as much to them as it did to me, almost. I got here, and it took me a couple years to think that this was home. Now it is very convenient. Now I could buy this or that if I wanted something different. There was a time when I needed so much, and couldn't afford it. That is the way life goes. Now you had a lesson in living today. I am sorry if I have bent your ear.

TLB: It is very important to talk about all this time.

MVW: Have you talked to others who have been as enthusiastic as I have been?

TLB: I don't know if you know Mr. L.C. Dalman, he used to be the president of People's State Bank?

MVW: I went to High School with him.

TLB: He can tell you a lot.

MVW: You know in every school there are the ones who have, and the ones who don't have. I was very happy, and satisfied. When we had our fiftieth High School reunion, I was on the committee. I had a good relationship with him.

The only thing that I think about with European people, most of them are warm. The Dutch people are always known to be more or less cold, even though they have the saying, "Dutch love." We talk about that often. When my son lived in Chicago they always kidded him about, "You're not much if you're not Dutch." When he moved away they gave him a sign for that. Dutch people do think together, but they're not as warm as some of the others. Hungarian, Polish, Bohemian they are warmer people.

TLB: I have felt accepted here too. I feel welcomed by the community. I am going to finish up now, is there any final comments that you have about Holland?

MVW: I can tell you, that I think that Holland is the best little town in the world. When we would go out West for our vacations, by the time we got back around Chicago, and in around Benton Harbor I could hardly wait to get back here. The minute you come into Holland, it is clean, and orderly, and it is your home. I did have two brothers, and a sister living in Chicago. They would often bring friends, and relatives to visit here. We always had our house open. We had a lot of company.

Everybody loved Holland. That is the way that I feel too. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else, and to be near Lake Michigan. There is just something about that lake. It was fine to go on a vacation, but to come back. Those beautiful green trees, and the road out to Macatawa.

When I was young girl, that is what we would do, go out and get house maid jobs. I had house work one summer when I was fourteen years old, and the next year I was a nursemaid. That is the way that we made a little extra money. Those are the kinds of things that we did. I loved Macatawa.

TLB: At Macatawa Park you did that?

MVW: Yes. In those hills you know. Everybody in Holland would go out often to Macatawa. Now everything is closed off to us, but it was open. There was that hotel there, and there was that big walk. We had the Interurban. My husband, and I, we just loved Macatawa. We would go out there on dates, and just walk along Lake Michigan. Up the hills, there were cottages. My sister was a companion to an elderly woman, but she was the housemaid too. When the woman died, she left that cottage to my sister. So when my kids where growing up we spent our summers, a good share of our time, going out there. My kids loved that cottage. It has now been sold, but the cottage in our family is a big thing that we still talk about. We went out to Macatawa so much. It was just our way of life. [tape cuts off here] [end of interview]

Additional Memories of Holland Added After Interview, During the Editing Process

In 1927, the Civic Health Committee of the Women's Literary Club held a weekly Baby Clinic in the building behind the former City Hospital at Central Avenue and 12th Street. They would check, weigh, and prescribe formula for the babies brought in. There was a local doctor and two women from the club, Mrs. Nate Robbins and Mrs. Joe Rhea. I worked for Nate Robbins at The De Pree Company at that time and after each time my mother took my baby daughter to the clinic, his wife would relay the results to him and he would tell me how my child was progressing. It was surely a heartwarming example of caring in a small city.

During World War II, there was a change in mail delivery in Holland. A motorcycle with a sidecar put on our route. Sipp Houtman, a popular mailman, was assigned to delivery. It was a big change, and everyone was fascinated seeing it drive around town.

When Tulip Time first started all the school children wore the simple blue and white costumes. My daughter attended Van Raalte school. The mothers would go to the schools on the Monday and Tuesday before the opening parade to the decorate the children's bicycles. It was a good occasion to meet the other mothers and work with them. The school provided the crepe paper.

There were two stores in Holland bearing the name of Steketee before 1910, at least and maybe longer. They were A. Steketee and B. Steketee. B. Steketee was located on 8th Street next to the Model Drug Store on River Avenue. There was also an entrance on River Avenue behind the Model. It was a dry goods store, and

I can remember going there with my mother as a little girl. There were bolts of materials such as calico, muslin, satin, gingham, and cheese cloth. Along the counters were spools of thread and sewing notions. The other store was A. Steketee on 8th Street in the middle of the next block. They sold women's clothing, coats, dresses, gloves, and intimate apparel. When we went there, I would see so many pretty things. The store was later sold to Grossman.

When I attended grade school in about 1914, my father worked at the Heinz Co. and it was my chore to hurry home from school at noon to take his noon meal to him at the factory. In the winter they only had a half hour break and my mother felt he needed a hot meal.

My parents came from Hungary and had to learn the language after they were over forty years of age. My mother went to night school taught by Minnie K. Smith, later the Junior High principal. She was firm, but kind and everyone in town loved her. Later she told me when my mother studied words she answered one of the lessons with "my girls are good," "my boys are better," and "my man is best." She received top marks for that and Miss Smith was so proud of her.

The Pere Marquette Railroad had a midnight train going to Chicago each night in those days, so if we wanted to have a letter delivered in Chicago the next day, we would get to the station before midnight to get it mailed.

Many years ago, one of Judge Gerrit Van Schelven's duties was to go to Eastmanville, or the "poor farm" it was called, to check up on the management. At that time, my husband drove the taxi for Joe White, a local businessman. Once

a year, he drove Judge Schelven to the farm and would wait for him there. After the meeting, the staff would serve a delicious chicken dinner and include the driver too. Then they would return to Holland.